

ADVENT WEEK 1 - HOPE IN THE WORLD

The Bible talks a lot about welcoming strangers, but how often do we stop and remember that Jesus was himself a refugee, fleeing Bethlehem for safety in Egypt?

READ

OLD TESTAMENT

For the Old Testament reading we recommend Deuteronomy 10.17-19 which challenges us to love and support those foreigners who live among us.

The LORD your God is supreme over all gods and over all powers. He is great and mighty, and he is to be feared. He does not show partiality, and he does not accept bribes. He makes sure that orphans and widows are treated fairly; he loves the foreigners who live with our people, and gives them food and clothes. So then, show love for those foreigners, because you were once foreigners in Egypt.

NEW TESTAMENT

For the New Testament reading we reflect on Jesus' own status as a refugee in Matthew 2.13-14.

After they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph and said, "Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him. So get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave."
Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and left during the night for Egypt

REFLECT

The Bible talks a lot about refugees, in both the Old and New Testaments, and Jesus even reminds us that, when we fail to welcome refugees, we fail to welcome him. Indeed welcoming refugees is one of the core commands that links the laws of the Old Testament with the good news of the New Testament. But this is made all the more impactful when we remember that Jesus' himself was a refugee – shortly after his birth Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus fled to find sanctuary in Egypt to avoid being killed by King Herod.

There is an old Celtic poem from the highlands of Scotland which contains the words "often, goes the Christ in the stranger's guise" and it's a powerful reminder that what we do to refugees, how we welcome them, support them, care for them, we also do to Jesus. How could you shape your home, your work, or your community into more welcoming and supportive places?



RUNE OF HOSPITALITY

I saw a stranger yestereen;
I put food in the eating place;
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place;
And, in the sacred name of the Triune,
He blessed myself and my house,
My cattle and my dear ones,
And the lark said in her song,
Often, often, often,
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise,
Often, often, often,
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.

PRAY

Heavenly Father and Almighty God,
soften our hearts to the plight of migrants and refugees,
through the example of the Blessed Mary, Mother of Mercy,
who sought refuge in Egypt to protect her son, our saviour.

Fill our hearts with love, compassion and generosity,
and with the Holy Spirit may we speak up against the ambivalence of the world.
May we never forget the teaching of your son Jesus Christ,
that, as we do to the least, we do to him.

Amen

ACT

"Often goes the Christ in the stranger's guise." Those are the challenging words of the ancient Celtic poem The Rune of Hospitality. Welcome is a calling throughout the Bible, from the earliest Prophet's through to Jesus' judgement in Matthew 25 that "whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me." You might be preparing to welcome family for Christmas Day, or getting ready to be welcomed yourself, but how could you help make your community more welcoming to those arriving from overseas?

You could start by changing the conversation about migrants. The communications organisation IMIX have produced a guide on how to change the conversation around Channel Crossings, a topic that might dominate conversations around the dinner table this Christmas. You can access the guide at imix.org.uk/calming-the-storm-how-to-talk-about-the-channel-crossings/

If you haven't bought your Christmas Cards yet, why not consider buying from Art for Refugees, who donate 50% of their profits to refugee organisations? You can find them online at artforefugees.com/cards

Maybe even the gift of a simple Merry Christmas to a refugee might bring a little joyful welcome. If you have Ukrainian's in your community, why not wish them a Різдвом Христовим (pronounced rizdvom khrystovym)?